



Testimony
Human Services Committee
Governor's Budget Recommendations
March 1, 2022

Submitted by Janine Fay, President/CEO VNA Community Healthcare & Hospice

Sen. Moore, Rep. Abercrombie, and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Janine Fay, the CEO of VNA Community Healthcare & Hospice, a DPH-licensed and Medicare-certified home health agency serving New Haven and Middlesex Counties. We serve hundreds of Medicaid patients a year. As you know, providing healthcare in the home is the most cost effective approach to care, and more importantly, it is the place individuals prefer to be.

You have undoubtedly heard from many providers across our health system regarding the impact of COVID over the last two years. But I want to share what has happened to the home health and hospice industry over not just the last couple years but over the last several decades. Home health and hospice providers have diligently provided care without being funded properly while operating with regulations that are forty years old. At the same time, the expectation is that we support acutely ill individuals in the home, who a few years ago, would have remained in the institutional setting due to their illnesses and needs.

The lack of funding and regulatory updates infers our industry is "less important." All of this started well before the pandemic, and as we know, COVID just made everything worse. When COVID relief funds began being distributed, our industry was once again low on the priority list. It was only later in the pandemic that home health was identified for ARPA funding. I do greatly appreciate that adjustments to our reimbursement were finally considered. However, it is unfortunate we only recently received part of that funding and other payments are still awaiting approval.

Once implemented, the reimbursement changes will help keep our agencies afloat, but it does not help us move forward in a sustainable way. For example, in 2016 the reimbursement for medication administration was reduced by 15%. In order to get back to that level, we would need another 10.5% rate increase on top of the recent rate change. My agency serves several hundred behavioral health clients. As each year goes by, we slip further and further into the negative and farther away from sustainability.

This is just one example of the populations served by our industry. Home health and hospice agencies care for those with both medically complex illnesses and behavioral health challenges. Our aging society is quickly increasing the demand for services in the home every day. Unfortunately, our system is nowhere near capable of meeting the demand without adequate funding to recruit and retain vital staff. **My agency turned away close to 100 patients in the month of January due to staffing shortages!**

Every industry is faced with a workforce shortage due to a multitude of reasons. However, the starting point for any recruitment is competitive wages. The home health and hospice sector is at a disadvantage from the start due to the stagnant, low reimbursement rates.

VNACommunityHealthcare.org

753 Boston Post Road | Guilford, CT 06437 | 203.458.4200
2319 Whitney Avenue | Hamden, CT 06518 | 203.288.1623

I appreciate the enormous decision making the Human Services Committee has to make to ensure our residents get the care they deserve. There is another bill before your committee, HB 5227 which looks to establish a new program to respond to complaints regarding home and community based services. While I support the concept behind this bill, allocating funding to a new program without FIRST strengthening our home health care system will not produce desired outcomes. Proper funding of home health must be step number one.

I believe we all have the same goal, to allow individuals and families to reach their optimal health status in the home setting. This requires access to the expertise of home healthcare. I hope the legislature and our State administration will recognize the importance of what we do and seek to strengthen our industry.

Thank you and if you have any questions you may contact me at jfay@vna-commh.org